



ERETZ YISRAEL – MEDINAT YISRAEL

Constructing Kedusha Progressively

The *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and its vessels were *hekdesh*, from the word *kadosh*, sanctified and dedicated exclusively for use in the *Mikdash*. Any personal use of *hekdesh* unrelated to the *Mishkan* or *Mikdash* violates a prohibition from the Torah called *meila*, as delineated in the Mishneh Torah. The Talmud asks how *Bnei Yisrael* could avoid committing *meila* during the construction of the *Mishkan* if inevitably, workers would come to sit on or under one of the *Mishkan's* beams during construction, thereby benefiting from *hekdesh*.

The Talmud¹ explains that during its construction, neither the *Mishkan* nor its materials were holy: “They would construct with the mundane and only afterward sanctify.” Only upon its completion was the *Mishkan* dedicated to G-d’s service, and only then did it become holy. Therefore, during the construction process, there was no prohibition of *meila*. On the spiritual plane, only after the arduous, physical labor was completed did the *Mishkan's* spiritual attributes manifest themselves. At this point, the *Mishkan* became G-d’s dwelling place, as the Torah attests: “So Moshe finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of G-d filled the Tabernacle.”²

Rav Shlomo Aviner, based on the teachings of Rav Kook, says that the practice of “constructing with the mundane and only afterward sanctifying” teaches that attaining holiness is a gradual process, often starting with the mundane. After

investing one’s energies to ensure a project comes to fruition, one appreciates the final product and the benefits derived from it all the more. Sometimes one cannot recognize what spirituality has to offer without first engaging with the physical world.

On a conceptual level, explains Rav Aviner, this lesson applies to *Medinat Yisrael* as well. At times we have trouble recognizing the spirituality inherent in today’s Israel, for the religious and spiritual potential of the Land and its infrastructure is far from realized. However, we must not forget that the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence, dwells in Israel, and any developments in the Land, even physical material ones, eventually have a spiritual impact. In *Eretz Yisrael*, a Jew can contribute to the physical infrastructure of the country and reap spiritual benefits, as opposed to other lands, where the Jews’ physical contributions have no spiritual components or consequences.

G-d never promised *Am Yisrael* a rose garden. Quite the contrary. The Land of Israel is referred to in Devarim as where, “the eyes of *Hashem*, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” While we welcome the consistent connection with G-d that Israel facilitates, the Sifrei explains we also pay a price for benefiting from the relationship. The Midrash explains that G-d takes upon Himself the unrelenting constant vigil over the Land: at times, for the better and at times, for the worse (depending on *Am Yisrael's* loyalty to Him).

One of the reasons why G-d has to keep constant vigil on His land is precisely because it invites challenges and obstructions, as we have seen throughout its arduous, tortuous history. Experiencing the challenges which come with building the Land of Israel, we may become discouraged. However, we can find solace and comfort in knowing that the country we appear to be constructing is in reality also a permanent dwelling place for G-d and His people. It is a country in which the Temple service of previous ages is reflected in the service of the millions of Jews who live here today, secular and religious alike.

I have been privileged to head an organization called *Makom Meshutaf* – Unified Place, which has recently joined with and is under the auspices of World Mizrachi. *Makom Meshutaf* offers secular *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* educational workshops and unique programming which promote Jewish values, history, tradition, and textual study, advocating tolerance and unity between Jews in Israel. I want to thank World Mizrachi for affording all Jews in *Medinat Yisrael* the opportunity to “construct in order to sanctify.”

1 Meila 14a.

2 Shemot 40:30.

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